



Talking Theology at *The Shack*

Week 6
Chapters 12 - 13

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Sophia

- ❖ As Mack leaves the waterfall, he again encounters Jesus, who is skipping stones across the water. Jesus asks Mack if he enjoyed his time with Sophia. Sophia is the name of the woman that Mack met behind the waterfall.
 - ***"Sophia" is the Old Testament name for the personification of God's wisdom. It is one of the ways in which the Old Testament depicts God's presence and work among us. You are not too far off if you think of "Sophia" as a name for the Holy Spirit.***

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Time and reality

- ❖ Mack is surprised to learn how little time elapsed while he was behind the waterfall. Jesus tells him that with Sarayu, time presents no boundaries.
 - ***This seems to be a way by saying that God exists outside time and can enter into time and move within time as God needs, to accomplish God's purposes.***
- ❖ Mack wants to know how "real" was the time with the children and Jesus at the waterfall. Jesus tells Mack that it was "very much real, far more real than life as you've known it."
 - ***Here, we are again reminded that the kingdom of God is quite real. Whether you call it the kingdom of God or heaven or God's realm, it is the most real reality.***

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Missy's time with God

- ❖ Mack then wants to know more about Missy after she was taken. How did she feel? Was she terrified? Was she alone? Did she feel abandoned? Jesus tells him that she was never alone.
- ❖ After Missy got over her shock, Sarayu wrapped herself around the six-year old and Missy settled down. There was a long ride that gave Missy and God a chance to talk. Missy prayed for Mack and for his peace. It is all overwhelming for Mack, and he breaks down into tears.

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Heaven?

- ❖ Mac asks Jesus if he got a glimpse into Heaven back at the waterfall. Jesus tells him “our final destiny is not the picture of Heaven that you have stuck in your head.”
 - Mack asks him, “what about all the pearly gates and gold stuff?” Jesus tells him that those images are pictures of Jesus and “the woman I'm in love with . . . It is a picture of my bride, the church: individuals who together form a spiritual city . . . And this city is always open, and each gate into it is made of a single pearl . . . that would be me!”
 - ***This image of the church is taken from the closing chapters of Revelation. Not all would agree that the image of the "new Jerusalem" is an image of the Church, the body of Christ.***
 - ***What images of heaven do you treasure? How are they connected to this world? How do you see yourself there?***

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The Church and churches

- ❖ Mack and Jesus then get into a long discussion about the Church (the body of Christ, the fellowship of believers) and the institutional church, which some would call "religion." For the author, it's only about relationships, never about institutions or organizations. Jesus says, for example, "I don't create institutions... never have, never will." The author lumps together religion, politics, and economics.
 - ***What is left in this conversation for a church such as St. Andrew? For the Methodist church? For any church? Do you think the author is urging us to be “unchurched followers of Jesus?”***

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Institutions and organizations

- ❖ **What would you make of this statement: "There is no healthy relationship with Jesus without a relationship to the church."**
- ❖ **This discussion goes on for a long time, relationships versus institutions. And it's certainly appropriate to be reminded of what God really wants from us and hopes for us.**
 - **But it's also true that in Romans 13, for example, Paul speaks to institutions that have been created by God. The classical interpretation is that God has created institutions and organizations to help us make our way forward through a world marred by sin. It is probably true that in the kingdom of God there will be no need for such institutions or organizations, but until the consummation of the kingdom, institutions and organizations are necessary and inescapable. The question is how we use them . . . and how we prevent them from using us.**

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"Sanctification"

- ❖ Mack tells Jesus that when he thinks about his "regular life back home," it just seems pretty overwhelming. Mack doesn't know how we could possibly change it all.
 - Jesus tells Mack that this isn't his work, that it is Sarayu's task, that the whole thing is a process, not an event.
- ❖ **Certainly, our growing in holiness is a process. Christians have often called this process, "sanctification." But this has always been seen as a cooperative effort, our effort and God's effort. That makes it different from salvation, which has always been understood to be God's work alone. However, sometimes I think that we draw a clearer line between "sanctification" and "salvation" than the Bible does. For example, Paul tells the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12).**

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All roads lead to Jesus?

- ❖ ***In closing, Jesus tells Mack, "Those who love me come from every system that exists . . . I have no desire to make them Christian. . . Mack asks if that means all roads lead to Jesus. Jesus answers, no, most roads don't lead anywhere, but Jesus will travel any road to find us.***
 - ***How does this strike you? I suspect that this is a passage in which some people find a “universalist” message.***
 - ***However, I don't think that is the point the author is trying to make or a doctrine that he is trying to put forward. I think it is simply more of the author's issues with the institutional religion called “Christianity.” I do come across people who say that they are followers of Jesus, but not Christians. I suspect they have the same issues in mind.***

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Purpose in Missy's murder? (Begin Ch. 13)

- ❖ Mack suggests that perhaps Missy died so that God could change Mack.
 - Papa stops Mack right there. "Don't ever assume that my using something means I caused it or that I needed it to accomplish my purposes. That will only lead you to false notions about me."
- ❖ ***The theology here is that God doesn't cause bad acts, but that God uses even those bad acts for good purposes. As Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (8:28).***

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Do you like Jesus best?

- ❖ Mack then tells Papa that he always like Jesus better. Papa replies, "He came to show people who I am and most folks only believe it about him. They still play us off like good cop/bad cop most of the time, especially the religious folk."
 - ***How true do you think this is? Have you also had difficulty embracing the notion that Jesus is the full and complete revelation of God? Why do you think this seems to be so hard for many people?***
 - ***All Scripture has to be read in the light of Christ. Scripture portrays an unfolding revelation of who God really is, culminating in Christ. Hence, we shouldn't be surprised that Jews and Christians will sometimes read the Old Testament differently.***

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Secrets and Lies

- ❖ Just as Jesus and Mack talked about secrets and lies, so now, do Papa and Mack. Papa tells Mack that she doesn't wonder what Mack will do or what choices Mack will make, for she simply knows and is relentless in her pursuit of Mack.
 - Papa tells Mack that his lies are like a little fortress, inside of which he can feel safe and powerful. The walls of the fortress are the justifications he makes for his lies. Of course, Mack, we know, didn't tell Nan about the note from Papa. Papa helps him to realize that he didn't keep the note secret to protect Nan, but to protect himself. In so doing, Mack might well have Nan from coming to the shack with him.

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Forgiveness

- ❖ Papa tells Mack that he needs to come clean with Nan and ask for forgiveness. And when he messes up again, to ask for forgiveness again . . . forgiveness is a process. "What if she doesn't forgive?" Mack asks. Papa replies, "That is the risk of faith. Faith does not grow in the house of the certainty."
 - ***The best synonym for "faith" is "trust" and the building of trust is always a process. It can never be forced or purchased.***

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Using Force

- ❖ Mack asks, “So you use pain to force people back to you?” Papa forgives him for even thinking that.
 - ***Many Christians cling to notions that God forces people to do things, even to believe or to love. But this is simply misguided – if God’s ultimate goal is love, force can have no role.***

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Mack tries to understand

- ❖ After again telling Mack that evil acts come with the freedom and the ensuing independence, we were given, Mack admits that it is all so hard to understand.
 - ***What do you think is most difficult for Mack to grasp about the nature of God’s love and what it means for this world and our lives with God?***
 - ***Do we have as much “unlearning” to do as Mack?***

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A world too small?

- ❖ Papa's answer is that Mack, and we, have too small a view of humanity. "You and this creation are incredible, whether you understand that or not. at it means to be human. "You are wonderful beyond imagination. Just because you make horrendous and destructive choices does not mean you deserve less respect for what you inherently are -- the pinnacle of my creation and the center of my affection."
- ❖ ***We often talk about our making God too small, but how about this? Do we stop to consider the possibility that God lets this world, with all its tragedies and evils, roll forward because of all the joy, beauty, and goodness of life and relationship?***

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Jesus' Accomplishment

- ❖ Mack asks, "What exactly did Jesus accomplish by dying?" Papa replies "Oh, nothing much. Just the substance of everything that love purposed from before the foundations of creation."
 - Papa goes on . . . Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God is now fully reconciled to the world, even to those who have not come to put their faith in God. But, reconciliation is a two-way street. Papa has done her part, totally, completely, finally. "It is not the nature of love to force a relationship, but it is the nature of love to open the way."

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